



The Effect of the Demographic Bubble on College Admissions

According to the National Association for College Admission Counseling and the National Center for Education Statistics, the high school graduating classes of 2008 and 2009 (about 3.2 million), dubbed the “echo boom”, has been the largest and most competitive applicant pool of students ever since the 3.15 million baby boomers graduated in 1977. About two-thirds of them applied for college spaces and a record-setting stream of applications went to top tier universities. The number of high school graduates has grown steadily as children of baby boomers reach adulthood and the bulge is expected to continue through the end of the decade. Although the demographic trend was predicted years before, the intensity with which it emerged not only came as a shock to colleges but also to professionals associated with the college admissions industry.

With the record high numbers of applications and the number of class seats remaining stable, many of the best known and most selective colleges have reported record low acceptance rates. After all, nobody likes an overcrowded classroom or a housing crunch. A common sentiment expressed by admissions officers from a wide range of colleges is that because of space limitations they are not able to take students whom they love. They dread having to go down the path of splitting hairs in having to make very fine distinctions among highly similar candidates.

Many students worked themselves to the bone to fulfill a dream, but the reality is that there aren't enough spaces at all of the Ivy League schools combined for every student with perfect SAT scores. In 2008 and 2009 Yale University set Ivy League records, accepting only 8.6 percent of its 21,099 applicants in 2008 and only 7.5 percent of its 26,000 applicants in 2009, compared to 2007 when the school accepted 9.7 percent of its 19,448 applicants. Other record lows were reported by:

- Columbia University, 9.6 percent in 2008; 9.8 percent.
- Brown University, 13.8 percent in 2008; 10.8 percent in 2009.
- Dartmouth College, 15.4 percent in 2008; 12 percent in 2009.
- University of Pennsylvania, 17.7 percent in 2008; 17.1 percent in 2009.
- Cornell, 20.4 percent in 2008; 17.4 percent in 2009.
- Harvard, 7.1 percent in 2008; 7 percent in 2009.
- Princeton, 9.3 percent in 2008; 9.8 percent in 2009.

Telephone: (516) 313-2988

nancybrennan27@yahoo.com

www.TheWriteDoc.com

Manhasset, NY

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